Cp917.5
K59m

MOUNTAIN MUSIC.

by

Winifred Kirkland.

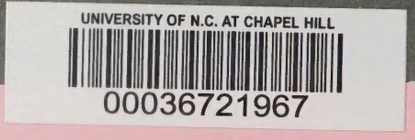
in

The Outlook, Dec. 31, 1919.

THE LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA

THE COLLECTION OF
NORTH CAROLINIANA
ENDOWED BY
JOHN SPRUNT HILL
CLASS OF 1889

Cp917.5
K59m



FOR USE ONLY IN
THE NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION

Form No. A-368, Rev. 8/95

V123

MOUNTAIN MUSIC

BY WINIFRED KIRKLAND

OVER and over again in these Southern highlands I catch myself listening to the stillness. New England woods can be genuinely silent, but these long black coves, these crests that turn sapphire and green and amethyst, these amber thickets of giant rhododendron—these are always palpitant with elfin undertones that match their elfin colors. The southern Appalachians are not like other mountains—they are haunted. Always the secrecy and romance of some elusive melody teases to be interpreted.

I well remember my first impression of mountain music. The young people of the farmhouse were giving a party. We were too travel-worn to attend, but from an upper window we watched. At first we wondered where the guests would come from, for no neighboring houses were to be seen, only the splendid solitude of Craggy bulking high upon the western horizon, but as dusk drew in and stars came pricking out above the towering peak other sounds than the itinerant chime of the wood thrush broke through the pregnant forest quiet. There were plashing of horses down at the ford, the ring of hoofs on wet and slippery rocks, and then everywhere about us rhododendron thicket and spruce recesses became alive with voices subdued but merry—the laugh of a girl, the gibe of a boy as he jolted some unsteady footlog. Presently the cleared lawn beneath the tree shadows was tremulous with young forms shifty in the moonlight and moving to the march of old games. Yet it is not the sight but the sound that remains with me. In the great branches of pine and chestnut the katydids were deafening, but below on the lawn the voices of boys and girls were always soft, melodious; never a raucous shout, never a shrill giggle. Manners preserved an old-world decorum here in the heart of the woods. Musical as a chant young throats sang:

"Jolly is the miller who lives by the mill,
The wheel goes round with a right good will,
One hand in the hopper and one in the sack—
Girls step forward and boys step back."

Idyllic as some ditty of Arcady is my first recollection of mountain music, and yet even then there was present to my ear something no stranger could ever fully fathom. On the next night of my sojourn my sleep was startled by sounds of savage contrast to that first evening. On the road leading past the little lumber settlement a quarter of a mile away mad hoofs were galloping to and fro, falsetto shouts rang sinister, and pistol shots cracked sharp upon the stillness, and these shrilling drunken boys were the same slim brown youths who had attended the party, whose rich baritones had blended with the purling pleasantness of the mountain brooks. Fast enough the mountains can change that pleasantness of little streams to the snarl of a perilous torrent, and fast enough a smiling boy face can blacken, his voice grow taut with curses, and the death doom of his ready gun snap through the silence.

Here in the woods human and animal sounds are subtly interfused. Mountain people can talk the language of beast and bird, treacherously enough sometimes, as when some woman or small boy squats hidden in the bracken and answers the liquid "bob-white" of the quail by the female's responsive love-cry, the low-whistled "whoo-oo-y, whoo-y." Nearer and nearer comes the confident "bob-white," although the bird itself remains to the end cautious and concealed until the last whispered "whoo-y" brings him to the view of a sure rifle.

I sometimes wonder where cattle calls come from, syllables sedulously handed down from one generation to the next. When the sheep come scuttling and scurrying with sharp, hurried bleatings across a pasture sown with boulders gray and shaggy as themselves, the cry that brings them to the salting is "sheep-i-nan, sheep-i-nan." When the cow bells are near at hand, their incessant clamor subdued by enfolding tree and bush, there is no need of calling the cows home, but when these are slow in returning from pasturage in the long gold twilight, then the cattle call of the mountains is a cry long to be remembered. Some mountain woman, standing by the bars, suddenly straightens and breathes deep, then utters a rich yodel that rings and echoes far and far up the black-recessed coves where who knows what mysterious evening herdsmen hold the cows. Patient, far-reaching, musical, it summons until the far bells reluctantly tinkle, and slowly come nearer and nearer; presently dusky horns and lumbering flanks emerge from deep forest gloom. While the cows shamble down to the home gate, from out the haunted ravine rings the sweet bell-note of the wood thrush, chiming on and on, at recurrent intervals, until full darkness possesses the forest, when another bird begins, and the pathos of the whip-poorwill issues from the wood like the swish of an elfin flail.

Animal life looms large in any impression of the mountains—animal life wild enough to haunt a remote climb with the padded stealth of a bear or the crackle of a rattler, and animal life tamed and serviceable, like that of the great lumber oxen. Down from the sawmill that chugs and shrills all day from a near-by gorge they trundle at sunset. I hear the clinking of chains before I see the sheen of black flanks and hear far off that most memorable of all mountain music, the singing of the lumbermen—rich male voices, always hard to locate because they echo so strangely sweet from the heart of rhododendron thicket or become muffled by the roar of a stream. Down past the house move the oxen with jingle of chains and pause to drink at the ford, a pool of pale gold framed by black green.

The noisy portable sawmill, briefly intrusive upon one ravine after another, makes little permanent effect upon the high dignity of mountain stillness. The place of its invasion where it has straddled some cataract is quickly obliterated by the stealthy green hands of fern and laurel, and its impertinent puffings and its screaming saws are subdued by the multitudinous murmur of the solitude. All human activity, all human personality, is merged into that incessant low murmuring of the woods. No wonder that mountain people learn to slip noiselessly along the trails, or that forms shy as fauns sometimes startle me, looking out from leafy frame, with watchful wildwood eyes. People here know how to hide away their cabin homes as bird and squirrel hide their nests. I have heard the tired wail of a child from some secret doorway, and have wondered if the crooning heart of the mountains holds comforting for little ones helpless before the caprice of some moody mountain mother.

Unthinkably remote as is this mountain life from all modernity, I once heard the melody of the highlands and the clatter of the vaudeville stage contend side by side for audience. The occasion was called an ice-cream festival, but the mildness with which one associates those words was not present here. As I sat on the dark porch of the host's shack, I looked through the lighted window, where on the bureau-top just inside lay a great murderous Colt. With darkling reference to its efficiency, the young mountaineer in charge of ceremonies announced that he didn't reckon to have no trouble around there that evening. The warning and the pistol supplied that sinister under-note always haunting the subdued decorum of mountain gatherings. Dusky tables were lighted by smoky lamps, and always silently some girl would be led away by some long, lithe youth to a seat at that shadowy board—crude enough act, which yet there beneath the high dim crest of Craggy against the stars had all the dignity of romance.

It was here on the porch that the two types of music competed; the old and beautiful, the new and tawdry. By all promptings of setting and of mood, the young people should have danced, but they dared not dance; church laws, the only genuine laws of the mountains, forbade dancing. Such strictness is an innovation on freer, older practice, and it was a tragedy for the old fiddler, who had given his life to making hearts and feet light for dancing. His white beard swept the strings, his eyes burned in appeal, and he fiddled with a mirth and music to make the heart break because he could win no response. Young feet stirred restlessly as they were entreated by the very gladness of the redbird's whistle, by the woven maze of fireflies in the pine, by the leaping flame of azalea against some black recess, but no one danced while the old man played his soul into the strings. Then in upon the elfin magic of his fiddle broke the ugly metallic discord of a phonograph set going for the evening's entertainment. It poured forth its vaudeville guffaws, its nasal vaudeville catches, its music-hall jokes. Valiantly for a while the old musician contended against an interruption so alien that he could not believe it would prevail. Yet it did, and slowly his brave old bow grew faint and its jocund wizardry died away, while the shining dance-lights in his eyes dimmed to a puzzled despair.

Yet how soon on that evening one forgot the phonograph! All alien vulgarity the mountains have power to subdue, inexorably secret. No wonder that mountain folk are given to long silences when they seem to be listening to the murmur of the woods rather than to the pettiness of neighborly chat. No wonder they translate that occult undertone into all manner of strange superstitions, propitiative to strong presences surmised. When the great winds come roaring down from the Balsam Gap, who shall interpret the summons of their trumpets? And who shall ever forget the sound of mountain rain? Its insistent downpour beats upon the brain as if that were but a drum that might be broken to serve some great thunder *motif* of the orchestra. Blare of the great wind, stealthy rustle of the fern, incessant roar of tumbling brooks, beat, beat, beat of rain, in their deep diapason, all petty human voices, and all cries of beasts that perish, all sweetest fluting of all redbirds, all are fused and forgotten.

Asheville, North Carolina.

THE BOOK TABLE: DEVOTED TO BOOKS AND THEIR MAKERS

SPANISH DRAMATISTS OF TO-DAY[1]

BY ALEXANDER GREEN

THE historian of the drama whose function is to label plays according to convenient types and periods is obliged to confess his impotence when he enters the uncharted sea of the present-day drama. This is the age of revolt, the period of experimentation with new ideas and new prejudices and new forms to clothe them.

So well have the contemporary Spanish dramatists followed the varying tendencies and changing methods of the time that there is no one definition of the past that could include the acknowledged masterpieces from José Echegaray down to Benavente.

There is one bond of type, however, that connects them all and sets them apart from the other dramatists of Europe and America; namely, the peculiarly Spanish atmosphere of their productions. Ibsen, with all his Scandinavian setting and Northern philosophy, remains a true cosmopolitan. Tchekoff's dramas of abstract character, for all their brooding Slavic atmosphere, hold out a strong appeal to all who appreciate the passing spectacle of humanity. The fact that Professor Lewisohn in his "Modern Drama" (1915) devotes no space whatever to the Spanish stage; that Barrett H. Clark in his "Continental Drama" (1915) discusses only Echegaray and Pérez Galdós; and that it has been practically only since 1915 that English translations have appeared of the other great Spanish dramatists, reveals a probable fear on the part of the translators that the characteristics peculiar to the Spanish drama would not appeal to the average American reader.

And there is some reason for this apprehension. Spain is in many respects still the land of old-fashioned romance, reminiscent of the days of Lope and Calderón. Headed to-day toward progress and social evolution, she has not yet succeeded in assuring the triumph of new ideas that in other countries are no longer questioned. Political and social equality in Spain are still mere desiderata. Ecclesiastical domination in politics is still a living problem which Pérez Galdós finds it necessary to challenge. The bull-ring is still popular enough to furnish Blasco Ibàñez, the social doctrinaire, with the weapons of antagonistic propaganda. An aristocracy exists for the lashing mockery of Benavente, the Shaw of Spain.

The modern Spanish theater begins with Echegaray and culminates in Benavente. The former, in his earlier years a romanticist on the order of Hugo, was the first modern to wean the Spanish theater from its trans-Pyrenaic influences. Between Echegaray and Benavente stands Pérez Galdós, the greatest literary genius of modern Spain, who has combined his rôle of powerful novelist with that of an inspired playwright. The younger group of dramatists, whose rise aptly coincides with the new Spain that was born of the rude political awakening of 1898, appeared under the leadership of these three men.

Joaquín Dicenta, Eduardo Marquina, Linares Rivas, Eduardo Zamacois (whose representative plays Professor Turrell has for the first time made accessible in excellent English rendering), the Alvarez Quinteros, and Martínez Sierra compose the new generation that has altogether outgrown the romantic theater of heroic sentiment and tedious declamation, and has evolved almost to the point of a "school" another marked feature of the present Spanish stage. This is the realistic drama of individual life, a picture of elemental forces pitted against social conventions. With exceptions, much of the Spanish

JACINTO BENAVENTE

The Spanish dramatist whose plays have been translated into English by John Garrett Underhill

stage of to-day consists of "speaking tableaux" of shrewd psychological observations made within the range of the average person's life and experiences.

Judged by present-day standards, even Echegaray, with his often interminable rhetoric and melodramatic effects so reminiscent of Scribe and Sardou, belongs properly to a former generation. At his best in "El gran Galeoto" (of which an English performance was given in Boston as early as 1900), he has already become a classic, like Calderón and Ibsen and the Shakespeare to whom his enthusiastic audience compared him on the occasion of the *première* of his "Madman or Saint." His return in 1905 to active politics was interpreted by competent observers as an ability on his part to read and to understand the signs of the times.

An intense and unflagging sympathy with ideas of reform and progress has kept Benito Pérez Galdós, the famous author of more than fifty novels, right up to the forefront of the modern drama. For sheer constancy of purpôse in social and political propaganda he is excelled only by the more radical Blasco Ibáñez of the ante-bellum days. The greatest triumph of his life, "Electra," which gives an incisive portrait of the conflict between conservatism and modern thought, drew upon itself the fiery indignation of the Clerical party, but also the sincere homage of the people. Vigorous realism and practical common sense distinguish also his "Grandfather," wherein another of the old Castilian traditions—family pride—receives condign treatment. With the approach of old age—he was born in 1845—Pérez Galdós has become a Socialist in the sense of being a broad-visioned social reformer.

His "Celia in the Slums," written in the second year of the World War, thus preaches an improvement of economic conditions. A still later play, "Solomon the Rogue," reveals the fact that the author hopes to see the great social change realized in the natural course of work, thrift, and orderly evolution.

Jacinto Benavente is the exact antithesis of Pérez Galdós. In his dramas he is never a propagandist and but rarely a partisan. On the contrary, he is a dilettante, and, like Anatole France, interested in everything and disturbed at nothing. He has no thesis to prove, no problem to solve, and no remedy to offer. The feminine heart, the frivolous philanderer, royalty and the moneyed class, misjudged charity and *bourgeois* morality, and the hundred and one comedies and tragedies of daily life, are just spoils for the author's keenness of observation and his genuis for irony. A true pedagogue, he teaches by laughter. Witness his masterpiece, "The Bonds of Interest," that profound comedy of masks recently produced in New York, in which between smiles and guffaws we soberly recognized our own dual selves, even as Tartarin of the Alps discovered what a strange compound he was of the heroic Quixote and the cowardly Sancho.

Benavente's reputation as a practical dramatist is shown by his recent appointment to the directorship of Spain's great National Theater. Having been an actor and playwright, like Lope de Rueda, Shakespeare, and Molière, Benavente now became a manager of his own plays, and it was the level-headed Benavente who somewhere said that both Shakespeare and Molière made a great deal of money as managers.

Thanks to the labors of Mr. Underhill, whose renderings convey at once the spirit, temperament, and the style of the author, we now possess translations not only of "La Malquerida," "The Evil Doers of Good," and "The Bonds of Interest," three plays of the highest order; but also of "The Governor's Wife," a drama of political and social bossism, "Princess Bebé," a record of a serious and successful search for truth amid many artificialities, and of "Autumnal Roses," the only piece in which Benavente approaches the problem play. It is to be hoped that in the place of mediocre curtain-raisers like "No Smoking," American readers may soon be made acquainted with his other plays of substance, such as "The Fire Dragon," "The Witches' Sabbath," or "La comida de las Fieras" (The Repast of Beasts), which play Martínez Sierra pronounced Benavente's masterpiece.

A younger man than Benavente, from whom he professes to have learned the principles of the drama, is Martínez Sierra. His highest aspiration is to be a *Spanish* dramatist. Spain for him is the best of all possible lands, Spanish ideals are unexcelled, Spanish women are the most beautiful and the most virtuous. His "Springtime in Autumn" extols Spanish conjugal fidelity, his "Mamá" features

[1] Contemporary Dramatists. Plays by Pérez Galdós, Linares Rivas, Marquina, Zamacois, Dicenta, and the Alvarez Quinteros. Translated by Charles Alfred Turrell. Richard G. Badger, Boston.

Plays by Jacinto Benavente. First and Second Series. Translated by John Garrett Underhill. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

p34443